



TANZ!

WITH DAVE TARRAS AND THE MUSIKER BROTHERS



On September 21, 1955, the temperature in New York City was cooler than average, but inside Columbia Records' 30th Street Studios, things were considerably hotter than usual. On that day, Dave Tarras and Sam Musiker began recording *TANZ!*, a landmark album of Jewish instrumental music. Largely unnoticed in its time, largely forgotten in ours, it remains a stunningly sophisticated fusion of Yiddish and American music forms.

When the LP was recorded, its senior clarinetist, Dave Tarras (1897-1989), was at the height of his powers. And the material before him was some of the most adventurous and challenging of his career: arranger Sam Musiker's juxtaposition of traditional klezmer style with the advanced harmony and rhythm of modern swing. With their foreshadowing of melodic elements and precise attention to interesting voicings, these arrangements are fueled by a unity of overall construction that gives *TANZ!* a thematic coherence years ahead of its time. It is arguably the greatest klezmer record ever issued.

TANZ!'s chief architect, composer/musician Sam Musiker (1916-1964), was, as his name implies, to the profession born, preceded by three generations of musicians from the region of Minsk. His father, Yossel, a klezmer trumpet player who emigrated to New York's Lower East Side, was his children's music teacher. Sam's older sister, Beverly, became a remarkable pianist, while his younger brother, Ray, followed Sam's example by mastering the clarinet, saxophone and flute.

Although the Musikers earned much of their livelihood playing in ethnic music bands – siblings and father played in Jewish ensembles, while Beverly also played in Greek groups – the pull toward American music was great. Sam Musiker's genius on clarinet and sax was

evidenced by his early acceptance into several American dance bands. During the Depression he was doing well enough to contribute \$100 a week to the family till.

Musiker's big break came in late 1938, when drummer Gene Krupa tapped him for a tenor sax and solo clarinet chair in his new big band. Sam was the

featured soloist on several important Krupa records: "Tuxedo Junction" (1940), "After You've Gone" (1941) and "Jungle Madness" (1938), Krupa's version of "Sing, Sing, Sing" – including an unreleased take on which "primitive" tom-toms pulse beneath Musiker's klezmer-like solo. (This previously unreleased take can



Tarras-Musiker wedding 1941 (Yossel Musiker second from left, Sergeant Sam Musiker center, Dave Tarras far right)

be heard on *From Avenue A To The Great White Way*, C2K 86323.) Eagle-eyed fans can catch a glimpse of Musiker playing with the Krupa band in Howard Hawks' 1941 film *Ball Of Fire*, starring Barbara Stanwyck and Gary Cooper.

Musiker's biggest break in Jewish music also involved a drummer: klezmer percussionist Irving Gratz. In 1939 Gratz introduced twenty-three-year-old Sammy Musiker to the reigning king of klezmer clarinet, Dave Tarras – curiously referred to as "The Jewish Benny Goodman."

"Dave Tarras came over to me one Friday and he says, 'Irving, I need a saxophone player, who can I get?'" Gratz recalled. "I says, 'Just a moment.' Sammy Musiker was in the hiring hall of Local 802 because he was at that time with Gene Krupa, but they were off a couple of weeks, they were going to start in the New York Paramount on the stage."

So I went over to Sammy Musiker and I said: 'Sammy, I can get you a job for tomorrow if you're not working.' He said: 'Irving, the only job I'm going to take is I want to hear Dave Tarras. If I could get a job with Dave Tarras, I will take it.' I said, 'You got it!' Just like that: 'You got it!'"

Musiker, like everyone else, was dazzled by Tarras – by his immense musical power, his effortless control over difficult passages, his innate sense of melody, and his graceful skill as a soloist and an accompanist. But the young man got more than a musical education from his association with Tarras. Musiker fell in love with and married Tarras' daughter, Branele (Brownie). Among the gifts the couple received was "Bran's Chasene," the 1941 disc Tarras composed and recorded to commemorate the wedding. Tarras was proud and supportive of his new son-in-law, and included him on as many jobs as he could. Young Sammy would return the favor in spades.

Musiker developed a sound so like his mentor's that when he wanted, no one could tell them apart. But



Sam Musiker on leave (1943)

Musiker's ego would not let him merely imitate a style or sound, and he pushed on to explore his own interpretations, incorporating lessons learned from Tarras and Krupa. The results were extraordinary.

In 1942 Musiker left Krupa and entered the United States Army, serving as a master sergeant in a

military band stationed at Washington D.C.'s Bowling Field. Home from duty in 1946, he looked to get back into the music business he'd left. Why would someone who had already made it on the American scene, who had proved himself the equal of other, better-known reed players, willingly return to the parochial and somewhat limiting Jewish music world? On some level, his choice was practical: big bands were on their way out, so keeping a hand in Yiddish music was eminently levelheaded. But an entirely new concept was gestating in Musiker's mind. A series of recording sessions over the next ten years combined to deliver it.

The first of Dave Tarras and Sam Musiker's studio collaborations came in 1946, when Tarras got a call from Savoy, the cutting-edge jazz label. At the time Tarras was the featured clarinetist on a popular New York radio show called "Yiddish Melodies In Swing," on station WHN. "Savoy came to me," he said. "They were *yidn* from Newark. They wanted a band that mixed Jewish and jazz. And I arranged for a band and I made Sammy do the arrangements. He made beautiful arrangements."

He did. Using the structure pioneered by trumpet player Ziggy Elman on his popular 1938 recording "Fralich In Swing (And The Angels Sing)," Musiker created performances that moved seamlessly from the opening A section, an American swing version of a traditional klezmer dance tune, into B, a bouncy traditional Jewish performance of the tune, then back into A for a big "production number" finish, American-style.

Musiker effectively constructed his arrangements avoiding Tarras' weakness – his lack of jazz soloing ability – and emphasizing his strengths. So Tarras sits out the opening swing ensemble, solos brilliantly in the "Jewish" section and soars above the band at the end.

The two Savoy sessions, in 1946 and 1947, produced ten sides. But as Tarras noted: "The stores said, 'It's a good record, it's beautiful, but if it's jazz we want, we got Benny Goodman. It's not Jewish 'cause it's mixing in too much jazz, and it's not jazz 'cause it's mixing in too much Jewish.' They had a contract with me for more records, but they stopped it and they paid me a lump of money to get out of the contract. I really loved the records, but I let them out of the contract."

In 1952, Musiker and his brother, Ray, recorded four sides for RCA Victor. Concurrently, Musiker appeared on a Tarras session for the Period label, playing some breathtaking Stan Getz-style tenor sax solos, despite the stodgily wooden Jewish rhythm section plodding along behind him.

Tarras and Musiker's next and biggest collaboration came a few years later. In 1955, Columbia Records' new budget label, Epic, looking to fill its catalog, granted Sam Musiker free rein to make a Jewish music LP. CBS was willing to put out this record on their low-rent line, from a young musician with a good reputation and crossover appeal. Musiker got to work, fast.

In developing melodic lines, Musiker applied the liberties of jazz improvisation to the logic of klezmer. His

sense of "fusion" demonstrates clear choice amid the aspects of Jewish he decided to keep (the *bulgar* rhythm in the drums) and to alter (the swing-derived harmonies of the horn figures). His decisions make for a balanced, textured mélange.

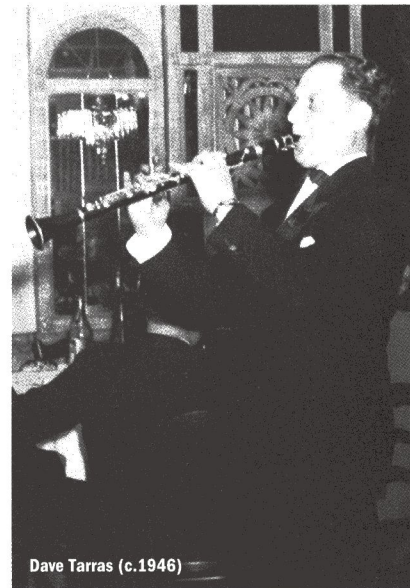
The two sessions that produced *TANZ!* ("Dance!") were a model of efficiency: twelve of the fourteen tracks were recorded on the first day, leaving the second day for the other two tunes and whatever alternate takes were needed. Few were. Like Alfred Hitchcock, famed for visualizing and meticulously story-boarding each of his films, Musiker heard the entire LP in his head long before the tape started rolling. The album was essentially recorded in the order in which it would be heard, a rarity then and now.

Although the record contains compositions from other composers (including Tarras and the Yiddish theater tunesmith Alexander Olshanetsky), it is primarily a showcase for the composition, performance and arranging skills of Sam Musiker and for the musical mastery of his mentor/rival/father-in-law, Dave Tarras. Musiker's dappled relationship with Tarras, his desire both to please and exceed him, led the younger player to create in *TANZ!* a testament to Tarras and a foothold for his own establishment as klezmer titan for the new era.

A recording session's producer can often be its auteur, but in the case of *TANZ!*, full credit for the recording goes to Sam Musiker. In addition to his brilliant conceptualization of the package, extraordinary arrangements and fresh compositions, Musiker assembled the paramount mix of musicians that delivered his vision whole.

Yet, despite commanding compositions and virtuoso playing by some of New York's top musicians – Melvin ("Red") Solomon on trumpet, Seymour ("Cy Mann") Megenheimer, accordion, Moe Wechsler, piano, Mac Chopnick, bass, Carl Praeger, bass clarinet, Irving Gratz,

drums and Dave, Sam and Ray Musiker on clarinet and sax – the record tanked, due in part to CBS's indifferent promotion. Part of that promotion was the LP art. Jewish music album covers of the day tended to feature Presbyterian-looking dancers or second-string models making like fresh-scrubbed pseudo-Zionist youth. (*TANZ!* got both.) And *TANZ!*'s liner notes, by Ivan Fiedel (son of the great klezmer cornetist Alex Fiedel), read as if they were written for someone who was not only not a Jew but had never met one. All in all, CBS didn't release this record so much as allow it to escape.



Dave Tarras (c.1946)

Sam Musiker with the
Gene Krupa Orchestra



Within months, it was impossible for the record-buying public to find a copy.

Admittedly, fewer and fewer record-buyers were looking. After World War Two, listeners of old-fashioned Yiddish music were tuning to the newer, simpler Israeli music. Although Musiker knew that klezmer and the sophisticated swing he loved were both in decline, it must have stung that his record flopped. Even so, he was still getting calls. In addition to his work on local TV and recording animation soundtracks at the "Terrytoons" studios, in 1958, RCA hired him to play klezmer clarinet specialties on *Raisins And Almonds Cha Cha Cha And Merengues*, a big-budget novelty LP featuring Latino pianist Johnny Conquet and His Orchestra.

As Musiker's popularity diminished, he grew bitter. Now only nickel-and-dime Jewish labels sought him out to record albums far beneath his abilities, while penny ante "producers" told him what to play and how to play it. Envy of his younger brother Ray's security as a public school music teacher, Sam Musiker left full-time playing to begin his own teaching career.

He withdrew completely from the New York music scene by moving himself and his family to Arizona, where he died of heart failure in 1964 at age 48, leaving an unfulfilled legacy. Had he lived into the 1970s like his father-in-law and brother, he too would be lionized by the young musicians who comprise the klezmer revival. In many ways, Musiker is the godfather of that revival. Melding talent with a fierce desire for synthesis of traditional Jewish and modern American music, Musiker pointed the way to klezmer in its most progressive form. If *TANZ!* failed to ensure Sam Musiker's place in klezmer history during his lifetime, its issue does so now.

TANZ! opens with "Intro: Rumania" (1), a melody by Alexander Olshanetsky, the most urbane of Yiddish theater composers. The piece is a purposeful entrance for the twin clarinets of Musiker and

Tarras, heralding their arrival in mutually supportive parallel thirds that express their equity as players. Musiker steps aside as the piece segues into "Gypsy" (2), an homage to Dave Tarras, who takes center stage with a classic clarinet solo played in his solid style.

Musiker then sets Tarras up for the *ne plus ultra* of the klezmer's art: the *doina* medley. The dramatically-introspective-then-accelerating sections of "The Roumanian Fantasy" (3) are a window to the inner workings of the music and the musician. Tarras is in his element here, playing his own composition backed by a simple accompaniment that only hints at Musiker's gift for innovative altered harmonies and chord substitutions.

Next comes the snappy dotted rhythm of what players of Tarras' vintage referred to as the *terkish*, here dubbed "Tango" (4), replete with castanets straight out of Central Casting. The medley ends with "Tanz! Bulgar" (5), a particularly energetic take on the traditional form. Beneath the lushness of Tarras' trademark low-register sound, Musiker's knowledge of American music is audible in his graceful, descending horn lines, rooted in klezmer but unquestionably hip. The introduction of these colorful voicings prepares us for the record's shift in tone.

Having honored Tarras with the opening solo, Musiker takes over with the smoothly complex "Sam's Bulgar" (6), one of five pieces he wrote for the record. Another Musiker original, the lovely reverie "Der Yemenite Tanz" (7) forays into the "Middle Eastern" style that had begun to nudge out Yiddish music on stage, radio and record with the establishment of Israel in 1948. The first, or "Yemenite" portion begins with an exploration of tonalities produced by bass clarinet, English horn and hand drums, with a theme restatement that emphasizes the open-fifth interval in the chords – a popular scoring device meant to imply the exotic. Immediately afterward the *tanz*, or dance segment is played as a red-hot *bulgar*, with all traces of

"exoticism" gone. Above its steamroller rhythm – including Ray Musiker's insistent tenor sax fills – Musiker begins gingerly, yet freely, to improvise over the band's repeated figures in the record's first inking of Jewish-jazz style.

The B side opens with a full restatement of "Rumania" (8), the Alexander Olshanetsky composition that opens the LP. This time the fanfare of clarinets leads into a feature for Musiker.

The suite of tunes "Der Neier Doina/Der Cholum Fun Yid/Sam Shpielt" (9, 10, 11) is the apex of Sam Musiker's musicianship on this record, with *doina*-playing as demonstrative of the art as Tarras' on the A side. After the highly-orchestrated opening, Musiker goes "off-page" – literally – into the diverse melodic possibilities of free improvisation before returning to the set arrangement. In recording the *doina*, Musiker returned the next day to vary what he had set down previously. In four takes (16), he challenged himself into finer and more introspective spins on *doina* motifs, as if looking for ways to extend the tonal framework of klezmer music. (For the LP, Musiker stuck with the first take.)

Following the *doina* is the transitional dance tune "Der Cholum Fun Yid" ("A Hebrew's Dream"), an old-fashioned Romanian-style *hora* in 3/8 meter. Here Musiker's arrangement funnels into spare use of the accordion right hand and tom-toms under low-register clarinet. With "Sam Shpielt" the arrangement is turned inside out again, with a firm return to the modern, sophisticated Sam Musiker. His finger-busting, interval-stretching, octave-hopping compositions gave nod to Tarras finger-busters like "The Bumblebee" while throwing down the gauntlet in declaration of his own mastery.

The LP then shifts back to where it started, a more mainstream, almost evocative recording that basks in the old repertoire then standard on Yiddish bandstands.

The first of these, "Silkene Pajamas" (12), written by Gussie Juvelier, features "Red" Solomon referencing the Ziggy Elman "Jewish" trumpet sound made famous years before. Surprisingly, the tune also contains a section, not used on the final recording but included here, in which Tarras pays tribute to his early arch-rival, Nafule Brandwein, by playing a bit of the *terkish* "Der Ziser Bulgar," which Brandwein recorded in 1923 (15). It is moving and unexpected to hear Tarras salute his longtime competitor in this way.

The next selection, simply called "A Bulgar" (13), comes from Tarras' earliest American Jewish dance band experience and was closely associated with him. He was so at ease with the piece (he even sneaks in an extra little *doina* at the finish), they got it down in only two takes.

TANZ! ends with one last surprise. Whereas the record opens with the clarinets of Tarras and Musiker, its final selection – Herman Yablokoff's 1923 hit "Papirossen" (14) – features a trio, bringing Ray Musiker into the mix to further harmonic texture as well as the tradition of extended klezmer families playing together. The lead is carried not by Dave Tarras but by Sam Musiker, a symbolic passing of the baton to the next generation. – **Henry Sapoznik**

Henry Sapoznik is a Grammy®-nominated record producer, composer, author and performer of traditional Yiddish and American music. A pioneering scholar and performer of klezmer music, Mr. Sapoznik is the Executive Director of "Living Traditions" – sponsors of the internationally acclaimed Yiddish cultural event "KlezKamp: The Yiddish-Folk Arts Program." He created the score for the Aviva Kempner documentary film *The Life And Times Of Hank Greenberg* (2000) and is the author of the award-winning book *Klezmer! Jewish Music From Old World To Our World* (Schirmer Books). He is the co-producer of the 2002 National Public Radio series *The Yiddish Radio Project*.

1. Intro: RUMANIA

—OLSHANETSKY—

Featuring Sam Musiker and Dave Tarras, clarinets

2. GYPSY

—TRADITIONAL—

Featuring Dave Tarras, clarinet

3. THE ROUMANIAN FANTASY

—TARRAS—

Featuring Dave Tarras, clarinet

4. TANGO

—TARRAS—

Featuring Dave Tarras, clarinet

5. TANZ! BULGAR

—TRADITIONAL—

Featuring Dave Tarras, clarinet

6. SAM'S BULGAR

—MUSIKER—

Featuring Sam Musiker, clarinet

7. DER YEMENITE TANZ

—MUSIKER—

Featuring Sam Musiker, clarinet

8. RUMANIA

—OLSHANETSKY—

Featuring Sam Musiker and Dave Tarras, clarinets

9. DER NEIER DOINA

—MUSIKER—

Featuring Sam Musiker, clarinet

10. DER CHOLUM FUN YID

—MUSIKER—

Featuring Sam Musiker, clarinet

11. SAM SHPIELT

—MUSIKER—

Featuring Sam Musiker, clarinet

12. SILKENE PAJAMAS

—MUSIC: JUVELIER—WORDS: RUND—

Featuring Dave Tarras, clarinet

13. A BULGAR

—TRADITIONAL—

Featuring Dave Tarras, clarinet

14. PAPIROSSEN

—YABLOKOFF—

Featuring Sam Musiker, Ray Musiker
and Dave Tarras, clarinets

Previously Unreleased Bonus Tracks:

15. SILKENE PAJAMAS (Alternate Take)

—MUSIC: JUVELIER—WORDS: RUND—

Featuring Dave Tarras, clarinet

16. DER NEIER DOINA (Alternate Take)

—MUSIKER—

Featuring Sam Musiker, clarinet

Executive Producer: Arthur Levy

Original Recordings Produced by Marvin Holzmann

Reissue Producers: Henry Sapoznik & Michael Brooks

Sound Restoration & Digital Remastering: Darcy M. Proper at Sony Music Studios, New York

Legacy A&R: Steve Berkowitz

Project Direction: Adam Block & Joy Gilbert Monfried

A&R Coordination: Patti Matheny, Darren Salmieri & Kyle Wofford

Art Direction: Howard Fritzson

Design: Margery Greenspan/MG Design

Packaging Manager: Abe Vélez

Photos courtesy of Ray Musiker

Front cover from the original LP

Original *TANZ!* LP art from the collection of Lorin Sklamberg

Thanks to Ray Musiker, Carrie Schneider, Lorin Sklamberg, Pete Sokolow

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T A N Z !

with Dave Tarras and Sam Musiker

1. Intro - RUMANIA -Olshanetsky- Featuring
Sam Musiker & Dave Tarras on Clarinet
GYPSY -Trad.- Featuring Dave Tarras: Clarinet

LN 3219

**NONBREAKABLE
(XEM 37586)**

2. THE ROUMANIAN FANTASY -Tarras-
T A N G O -Tarras-
TANZ! BULGAR -Traditional-
Featuring Dave Tarras on Clarinet
3. SAM'S BULGAR -Musiker-
Featuring Sam Musiker on Clarinet
4. DER YEMENITE TANZ (The Yeminite
Dance) -Musiker- Featuring
Sam Musiker on
Clarinet

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- 1. Intro: RUMANIA 2. GYPSY 3. THE ROUMANIAN FANTASY
4. TANGO 5. TANZ! BULGAR 6. SAM'S BULGAR
7. DER YEMENITE TANZ 8. RUMANIA 9. DER NEIER DOINA
10. DER CHOLUM FUN YID 11. SAM SHPIELT
12. SILKENE PAJAMAS 13. A BULGAR 14. PAPIROSSEN**

Previously Unreleased Bonus Tracks:

- 15. SILKENE PAJAMAS** (Alternate Take)*
16. DER NEIER DOINA (Alternate Take)*

Executive Producer: Arthur Levy

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TANZ! *deEE*
With Dave Tarras And The Musiker Brothers

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